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ABSTRACT

The basic sexual knowledge exhibited by trainees in counseling and student personnel work was compared with knowledge exhibited by other graduate students and community college students. Subjects (N=161) completed the Student Sex Knowledge Survey (SSKS). Results indicated that: (1) females scored significantly higher than males: (2) counseling and student personnel worker trainees had similar knowledge to other graduate students: and (3) graduate students knew more than community college students. (Author)

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SEXUAL KNOWLEDGEABILITY OF COUNSELOR AND STUDENT PERSONNEL WORKER TRAINEES COMPARED TO OTHER STUDENTS

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Kirkpatrick (1975) commented on the high likelihood that counselors and student personnel workers who serve young populations will see clients with sexual concerns, regardless of their work settings. Since that publication the likelihood has increased. Zelnik and Kantner's (1977) latest report shows that the incidence of sexual intercourse among adolescents continues to rise. Mann (1975) wrote that while sex counseling is "Here to stay," the existing programs cannot meet the demands of able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual populations. Yet, the author's review of graduate bulletins from 40 randomly selected institutions offering graduate training in counseling and student personnel work revealed that none of the 40 institutions offered courses in sex counseling. Thus, counselors and student personnel workers may leave training without the basic knowledge of sexuality which Annon (1976) identified as useful in alleviating many and various kinds of cliental concerns with sexuality.

Starks (1971) published the only research currently available on the sexual knowledgeability of counselors. He conducted 25 interviews with practicing school counselors and drew the qualitative conclusion that this population knew too little about human sexuality. Later, Kirkpatrick (1978) surveyed nationwide samples of counselor educators and counselors practicing in colleges and schools. The 124 respondents to the survey rated 17 of 20 facts about sexuality as important information for new counselors to have as they leave training and begin to practice.

This paper reports the results of a study to compare the basic sexual knowledge exhibited by trainees in counseling and student personnel work with other graduate students and community college students. The analyses also compared the knowledgeability of men and women in those groups. Thus, the research tested two null hypotheses:

H_o^1: Sexual knowledgeability of counselor and student personnel worker trainees, other graduate students, and community college students does not differ.

H_o^2: Sexual knowledgeability of males and females in the above populations does not differ.

Methodology

The author devised an instrument covering basic sexual knowledgeability to test the above hypotheses, the Student Sex Knowledge Survey (SSKS).

Instrumentation

Construction of the SSKS began with a pool of 40 multiple choice and 40 true-false items. The final instrument consisted of 25 items of each type with multiple choice items scored at 3 points and true-false items at 1 point. Therefore, possible scores ranged from 0 to 100.

Validity. A panel of three sex educators and sex counselors with a combined total of 14 years of full-time experience selected the items for the SSKS based upon the specifications in Table 1, which also includes a sample of three items of each type. The correct responses to each item were verified by referring to authoritative texts in each area (Crouch & McClintic, 1971; Masters & Jonhson, 1966, 1970; McCary, 1971, 1974).

Reliability. A sample of 15 Ss from the populations described below took the SSKS to test for reliability. The Spearman-Brown Prophesy Formula method yielded an $r=.904$ ($p<.001$); a sufficiently high coefficient for an instrument of this type. These 15 S's scores were omitted from the ensuing analyses.

Populations

A total of 181 Ss took the SSKS. Of these, 42 (23 male and 19 female) were trainees in student personnel work and counseling at two state universities in the desert southwest. Another 67 Ss (29 females and 38 males) from the same universities also participated but they were majoring in areas from a wide variety of disciplines: business administration, pharmacy, law, medicine, the biological and physical sciences, and the humanities. Some of this second group were beginning master's degree students and some were pursuing the doctorate. The sample of community college students included 72 Ss (36 of each sex), majoring in a wide variety of academic and vocational areas.

The Ss responses to demographic questions on the prepared answer sheet for the SSKS revealed that the average age for all three samples fell between 27 and 29 years, that all but three Ss reported having had sexual intercourse at least once, and that 74% were currently or previously married when they took the SSKS.

Results

The initial 2x3 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the cells in the design had heterogeneous variances according to Bartlett's Box F test. Therefore, to avoid violation of the homogeniety of variances assumption for the ANOVA, 15 Ss were randomly selected from each cell to permit the ANOVA under its robustness to violations of the homogeniety of variances assumption if the cells in the design have equal n's. Tables 2 and 3 contain the results of that analysis; Table 2 shows the mean SSKS scores for the six cells and Table 3 reports the ANOVA's results.

Both main effects showed significance at $p<.001$. Scheffé's *post hoc* test for the significant main effect of majors resulted in a critical minimum difference between means of 11.14 at $p<.05$. Inspection of the means in Table 2 for the three samples according to major field reveals that the counseling and student personnel work trainees did not differ with statistical significance from the sample pursuing other graduate majors, but that both of those samples differed significantly from the community college students. The results reject both null hypotheses.

For purposes of comparison, a sample of 11 family planning clinic workers (which excluded physicians and registered nurses) scored a mean of 99.09 on SSKS with a variance of 1.08 and a range of scores from 97 to 100. They took the SSKS to allow comparisons of the research Ss' scores with a sample of persons who would presumably have a sound, basic knowledge of the material covered in the SSKS. Several of the clinic workers remarked that the items on the SSKS were trivial.

Discussion

Clearly, the Ss in the research samples did not find the SSKS trivial. When compared to the more knowledgeable family planning clinicians, the Ss' scores indicate a basic lack of knowledgeability in human sexuality. These findings confirm Starks' (1971) conclusion that counselors have inadequate knowledgeability of human sexuality and add two more verified facts. The lack of knowledge can now be statistically proven. Second, one can envision counselor and student personnel worker trainees or recent graduates attempting to offer assistance to a graduate student with a sexual problem who has similar, poor knowledgeability of sexuality.

If the samples of graduate students differed from the sample of community college students with respect to age, marital status, sexual experience, or

some similar variable, that might explain the significantly better performance of the graduate students on the SSKS. Since they were similar in these respects, some factor related to educational level or academic experience probably accounts for the resluts. The graduate student may have had better test-taking skills, may have had more opportunities to take courses in sexuality, or may have had more opportunities to read materials related to sexuality. However, the data do allow the conclusion that the trainees in student personnel work and counseling could easily find themselves attempting to assist a community college student with a sexual concern who has an even poorer knowledge of human sexuality.

Many factors might explain the significantly higher scores for women on the SSKS: females may receive more sex education; more contraceptive methods require female knowledge and use than require male use; women may know more about female anatomy than men; and so forth. The results are interesting in light of the traditional double-standard myth that men know more about sex than women. The author's experiences in conducting question and answer sessions in dormitories, fraternities, and sororities as well as university classrooms led to the suspicion that the women were more knowledgeable, a suspicion which has now been confirmed. Such programs always attract a large audience; apparently the students themselves are aware of their ignorance. Student personnel workers and counselors working on the college campuses might work with their student health providers to start or expand such programs.

Summary

These results indicate that those who train counselors and student personnel workers and plan continuing education for them cannot assume that this population has sufficient knowledge of sexuality to offer the basic information

which a client might seek from an otherwise competent and trusted professional. Student personnel workers who regularly see clients with sexual concerns may need to consider making efforts to improve their sexual knowledgeability. Those who never hear about sexual concerns might consider Kirkpatrick's (1975) statement that, "Counselors must be willing to introduce discussions of sex into the interview when the need is indicated."

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Table 1. Specifications and Sample Items from SSKS

Topics:	Number of Items: Multiple Choice	True-Flase	Percentage of Possible Score
Sexual response	2	5	11%
Anatomy and physiology	9	5	32
Contraception	9	6	33
Venereal diseases	3	3	12
Sexual myths	2	6	12
Totals	25	25	100%

Sample items with correct response as indicated:

2. The labia cover the opening of the

a-Fallopian tubes b-clitoris c-vagina d-cervix e-none of the above.

8. Birth control pills

a-can be started at any time and be effective immediately

b-can be legally purchased without a perscription

c-prevent ovulation and thus pregnancy

d-greatly increase the chances of uterine cancer

e-none of the above.

11. Masturbation usually causes

a-fertility b-sterility c-impotence d-warts e-none of the above.

29. Syphilis can be easily transferred by toilet seats. (F)

42. Women can get pregnant from intercourse during menstrual flow. (T)

44. The penis must be at least 6" long when erect to cause orgasm in the female partner. (F)

Table 2. Mean SSKS Scores

	Major			
Sex	Counseling and Student Personnel Work	Other Graduates	Community College	Row Means
Male	59.400	56.400	42.067	52.622
Female	63.800	65.267	55.600	61.556
Column means	61.600	60.834	48.830	57.890

Table 3. ANOVA Summary Table for SSKS Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Sex	1795.600	1	1795.600	9.960	.001
Major	3075.756	2	1537.878	11.013	.001
Sex X Major	312.867	2	156.433	0.959	-----
Residual	13695.067	84	163.037		
Total	18879.289	89			